Cuba welcomes 50th anniversary of the PFLP leftist movement

BY SHEREN KHALEL - DECEMBER 15, 2017 - 7

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PAPER FLAGS DONNING PALESTINIAN AND CUBAN REVOLUTIONARIES WERE HANDED OUT AT THE EVENT (PHOTO: MONDOWEISS/SHEREN KHALEL)

Havana, Cuba — Three students took to the stage, the girl in a black traditional Palestinian robe embroidered with tiny hand-threaded red squares, the two boys donning the white and black checkered scarves of Palestine. The three twriled and jumped, kicking their legs in the air the same way their ancestors have performed Palestinian Dabka for centuries – only this performance took place thousands of miles from home, in the center of Havana, Cuba.

The event was set up by the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), to ring in the group's 50th anniversary.

The PFLP is a secular leftist Palestinian political party founded in 1967 that constitutes the second largest group within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

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YOUTH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TOOK TO THE STAGE FOR DANCE, POETRY AND MUSIC PERFORMANCES IN BETWEEN POLITICAL SPEECHES. (PHOTO: MONDOWEISS/SHEREN KHALEL)

Around 500 people gathered in a large government-owned community center in the middle of Havana for the event. Palestinian expats and students living in the city as well as locals and government officials attended, enjoying political speeches, music, and poetry.

While celebrations for the 50th anniversary took place in Palestinian communities all over the world, few were as openly celebrated as the event in Cuba.

The PFLP is deemed a terrorist group by the United States, Canada the Europe Union and Israel among others – meaning a celebration of this kind in New York could easily land participants in serious trouble with Homeland Security. In Cuba however, government ministers happily took to the stage to accept tokens of appreciation from the group's head in Cuba as well as the Palestinian ambassador to the country.

Mousa Solyman, the head of the PFLP in Cuba, told *Mondoweiss* that representing the group in Cuba was an experience like no other.

"In the West it seems all aspects of the Palestinian struggle are illegal, not just the PFLP, any combative organization that supports Palestinian rights are considered terrorists, but in Cuba the government is always supporting us because our cause is justice, and living and working here, that support is felt everyday," Solyman said.

Much of Solyman's work on the island consists of gathering, educating and supporting Palestinian university students in Havana, keeping the youth connected to home and encouraging their continued participation in Palestinian politics.

"It is a learning process, and doing that in Cuba is unlike anywhere else. We make a distinction between governments and the people, and while people in the West are supporting us more and more, the governments are controlled by Zionist lobbies that don't reflect the will of the people," Solyman explained.

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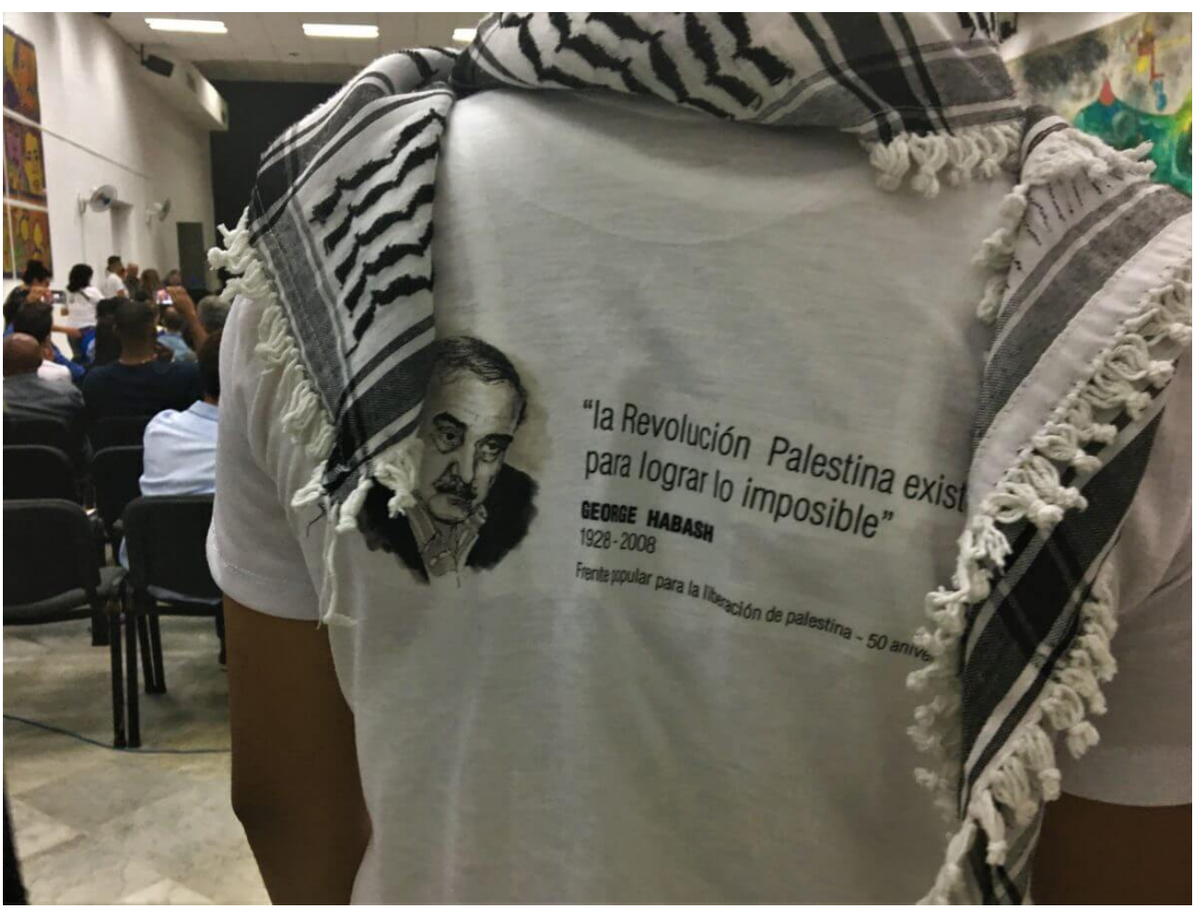
"In Cuba we have the support of the government and the people. Look how many non-Palestinians showed up here today, that alone is impressive," he said motioning toward the crowd of people gathered outside the community center, mingling amongst each other after the event.



STUDENTS WORE SHIRTS WITH QUOTES OF PFLP LEADERS PRINTED IN SPANISH, HANDING THEM OUT AT THE EVENT. (PHOTO: MONDOWEISS/SHEREN KHALEL)

While the 50th anniversary may have otherwise been more jovial with more lively performances focused on celebrating the long history between Palestine — particularly the PFLP party — and the Cuban government and people, instead things took a slightly somber tone, due to current events regarding Jerusalem.

Because the event in Havana took place just days after U.S. President Donald Trump announced the U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the violence erupting on the streets of occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza was the focus of most conversations.

In Ramallah and Gaza, the anniversary event was renamed "The March Of Anger," under the slogan "The revolution continues until return and the liberation of Jerusalem" in solidarity with Jerusalem.

Following Trump's announcement, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs openly rejected the U.S. move, calling it "a serious and flagrant violation of the Charter of the UN, of International Law and of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations," in a statement released by the ministry.

AROUND 500 PEOPLE, BOTH PALESTINIAN AND CUBAN, ATTENDED THE EVENT IN THE HEART OF THE CITY. (PHOTO: MONDOWEISS/SHEREN KHALEL)

"This intention of the United States Government to modify the historic status of Jerusalem violates the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people and the Arab and Islamic nations, will have serious consequences for stability and security in the Middle East, will further increase tensions in this region and will impede any effort aimed at resuming peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians," the statement read.

Solyman thanked the Cuban government for being such an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause.

"We cannot thank the Cuban government and people enough for their support, and we are happy to be here today, as we have been the past 50 years in which Cuba has always supported the PFLP," Solyman said. "We look forward to continuing that support and that relationship for many years to come."